Alice Klimova

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After Kristallnacht 1, the British government decided to open its borders to Jewish children from the countries most endangered by National Socialism: Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia. From the end of 1938 until September 1939, the lives of about ten thousand children were saved in this fashion. A total of 669 children managed to travel out of Czechoslovakia. These transports were organized by Nicholas Winton, and Mrs. Alice Klimova thus became one of his "children." Along with her sister, she spent the war years in Great Britain, and like many emigrant children hoped that after the war she would once again be reunited with her family. Alas, like for many others, luck was not on her side either. Mrs. Klimova often participates in various get-togethers where she talks about her life. She also actively helped the director Matej Minac in the preparation of his film about Nicholas Winton and his rescue mission, called "The Power of Good."

Family background

My father's family was from Prague; my father was born in Liben [a Prague neighborhood]. Alas, I didn't know either of his parents. My grandmother died 14 days before my older sister Emilie was born, which is why she was named after her. We're apparently somehow related to the painter Alfred Justitz [1879-1934]. How exactly, I don't know. For thirty years now I've been saying that I'll find out, but I haven't gotten around to it yet.

My father's name was Bohumil Justitz and he was born on 14th October 1894. He had a number of siblings: sisters Kamila, married name Morawitzova, Olga, married name Epsteinova, and Helga, married name Tukova. It's possible he had one more sister, who however died very young. Then he also had two brothers, Karel and Rudolf. Their family was very close. They observed this unwritten rule that every Saturday they'd meet in some café. But only the adults, we children didn't go with them. I don't know why, but I remember that Uncle Karel died in 1937. All the other siblings perished in concentration camps during the war.

While I don't know anything at all about my father's parents, I remember those on my mother's side well. My grandfather's name was Julius Glauber and he was born on 1st April 1866 or 1867. He was a very affectionate, kind and nice person. One of my memories is from their apartment on Sokolska Street. There he had something for which there is great demand today: a writing desk with one of those roller tops. He used to sit at it and in the bottom right drawer he used to have cat's tongues [chocolates]. When I'd come over, he'd sit me on his knee, take out one tongue and say: 'One kitty, for my kitty.' Back then the custom was to give children things bit by bit, it wasn't customary to give them the entire bar, the way it's done today. He was one of those kind, affectionate grandfathers. He and his brother ran a coffee wholesale business on today's Opletalova Street, back then Lützova Street. My mother used to go do secretarial work for them; apparently they used to bring me there to her so she could nurse me. Grandpa died in April or May of 1933.

His wife's name was Otylie, nee Hellerova, and she was born on 8th August 1870. She had a sister, Laura, who knitted beautifully. My grandmother was one of those smaller, kind grannies that let you lick the pot and so on. I remember her mainly from the time when she lived with us after Grandpa died, first on Sokolska Street and then in Vinohrady [a Prague neighborhood]. She died in 1942 in Treblinka. Otherwise all my relatives died in Auschwitz.

Grandma and Grandpa lived at the corner of Sokolska and Zitna in a building that was the first in Prague to have central heating. Their apartment was on the first floor, and was huge, with six rooms. To a child everything seems bigger, but even today, when I look at it from the street, it makes the same impression on me. When you walked in, there was this long, narrow hallway and on the right were two rooms where my great-grandmother lived. That must have been still before we moved in there, and aside from the fact that she had this stuffed canapé with fringes, which my sister and I used to make fun of, I don't remember her. Then on the left there was a large kitchen and four rooms. The rooms were enormous, with high ceilings; I mainly remember the room where Grandpa's writing desk was, as well as the washroom, in which there was a hot water heater. I think that currently the apartment is derelict and there's nothing in it. My sister was born there.

My grandparents had two children: my mother, Ida, and my uncle Bedrich. My mother was born on 12th June 1894 in Prague. She definitely graduated from some gymnazium [high school] or lyceum, and afterwards she passed her state exams in English at the Faculty of Philosophy. Uncle Bedrich was born on 1st April sometime in the 1890s. I remember him as a big cutup. Around 1920 he and his family, his wife and two children, Eva and Vera, moved to Dresden, where they lived up until Kristallnacht. They then returned to Prague and at one time even lived in the same building as we did.

While my father's native tongue was definitely Czech, I suspect that for my mother it was more likely German. In any event, everyone in their families spoke both languages. As far as I can remember, my grandfather preferred Czech, while Grandma preferred to speak German.

I don't know when and where my parents met, but their wedding was on 29th January 1922, in Prague. The ceremony was most likely Jewish, but because it took place long before I was born, I can't guarantee that. That same year, on 22nd November 1922, my sister Emilie was born, and six years later, on 5th July 1928, so was I.

Growing up

At that time we lived in Dejvice [a Prague neighborhood] on what is now Kafkova, back then Bachmacska Street. After my grandfather died we moved into my grandparents' apartment, where we were for only one year, and then we moved to Vinohrady. So to this day, Prague to me means Dejvice and Vinohrady, where I lived until my departure for England in 1939.

I remember our home in Vinohrady as being a very pleasant, sunny place. Winters have been erased from my memory. The pleasant things always remain in your memory. We lived in this neighborhood of villas that was near Flora and we used to go on foot as far as to Wenceslaus Square. These days few people walk in Prague - back then that was nothing unusual for us. I think my father had a car since 1937. He used to drive it back and forth to work, and on Sundays we'd go on trips. But the way it's common these days to drive everywhere, that didn't exist back then. Vrsovice was nearby, where there were still many open hills that had not yet been built upon, where we used to sled in the winter. And there were parks close to the school I attended. We'd often go for walks to Rieger Gardens for example. It was simply this pleasant place to live.

We lived in a rental villa on Na Zajezdu Street. Its owner was the nephew of Skoda 2 from Pilsen, and had received it as a wedding present. The owners lived on the first floor, we on the ground floor, and on the second floor there was this two-room bachelor apartment, where Uncle Bedrich's family lived for a few months when they returned from Dresden. The house had a garden, and because the owners would leave during May for their cottage somewhere, my sister and I, the only children there, were allowed to pick the fruit.

We had a beautiful four-room apartment. It had a vestibule, across from it a living room where my parents slept, a dining room, Grandma's room, and a bedroom where my sister and I slept. You'd walk through our bedroom to get to the bathroom. Plus there was a kitchen, of course. I've got very beautiful memories of that place.

A little ways away from our house was the Orionka chocolate factory. [Editor's note: During the time of the First Republic, ORION became the largest producer of chocolate, sweets and baked goods. Today it dominates approximately 2/3 of the chocolate market in the Czech Republic] It always smelled beautifully there! Our mother would say, 'Girls, if you're good, you can walk by and smell it.' In front of Orionka there was always this wagon where they sold fruit. We used to walk by it on the way to school, and we'd always get 50 halers [1 Czechoslovak crown = 100 halers] or a crown [in 1929 the Czech crown was defined by law to be equivalent to 44.58 mg of gold], so that we could buy some fruit.

For a long time after the war, I didn't have the courage to walk by our house. It wasn't until sometime in 1947, when I was at some youth festival which ran late, and because there were no longer trams running, I had no way to get to Hanspaulka, where I was living at the time. So a girlfriend of mine, who lived on Ruska Street, offered that I could sleep at their place. So I had to walk by our house; she didn't know about it. Well, I dealt with it somehow. And in the morning, when I was returning, I noticed that that fruit wagon was still there in the same spot. The vendor suddenly asked me, 'What's your sister up to?' My jaw dropped and I asked him how he knew that I had a sister? 'Why, the two of you lived here and came by every day.' He'd recognized me, and I didn't recognize him of course. He knew that our parents had perished, and that only my sister and I were left. Those are these little memories.

Our father first worked as a traveling salesman. He walked around with a briefcase and sold things, perhaps still when I was born. Then he had his own business, with electrodes. First in Strasnice on Prubezna Street, then in Liben. Today it's up there in Holesovicky, as you drive down, on the right there are these nice little houses that are still there. My father was the only owner, and the company was tiny, at most twelve or fifteen employees. I used to go there very often and gladly, because they liked me there, too. When we lived in Vinohrady, it wasn't far to Prubezna, I think I even used to walk there. Back then there wasn't nearly as much traffic as today. After we moved to Holesovice I could no longer walk there alone anymore, it was too far, and so my mother probably used to take me there.

What were my parents like? If I could exaggerate slightly in describing my mother, I'd say that she had a bit of an aristocratic manner about her. She was always a lady. It of course had nothing to do with aristocracy. But she was always dressed in an exemplary fashion - she paid attention to that. I'd say that she was also quite educated for her time. She had state exams in English, which was quite unusual back then.

At home we spoke Czech and German. I think that my mother had more German schooling, but I can't say for sure, I don't know. My father had Czech schools, even though he also spoke German excellently. My father had been wounded in World War I, I think in 1933 they had to take one of his kidneys, and my mother then took exemplary care of him. Really with immense care and love. She was a housewife, because back then it was very rare for a woman to go to work. Those were really only those very poor families, where it was for financial reasons. Definitely not like today, when someone pursues a career. So our mother was at home and took care of us girls.

I did rhythmics [rhythmic gymnastics], today you'd probably call it gymnastics; I used to go where today Palac Metro is on Narodni Avenue, and my mother would accompany me. My sister didn't attend rhythmics, she played the piano. So basically our mother made sure that we had these various activities, so we had what was 'in' or done in a decent family. She of course also made sure that the family held together. Like almost everywhere else, siblings argued. But our mother took it very hard when someone used a word like 'cow' or something like that. No cuss words, that simply didn't exist, that wasn't allowed. Only when she was out of earshot. Our father was more tolerant in this, but not our mother, there was no way.

I can't even say that our parents were strict, but when they said something, that was the law. I remember absolutely exactly the one and only time I got a spanking from my father. On Saturday evening our parents' best friends used to come over to our place to visit. That was sometime after our relatives from Dresden had moved back to Prague, and then by coincidence lived for about two or three months in the same house as we did. Well, and I and my cousin Vera were supposed to get in the tub and have a bath. But I kept dawdling and didn't want to get in the tub, because I was embarrassed to get undressed in front that friend of my parents', that man. But I didn't want to say that. And I kept saying that I had to do this and that for school, that I had to fill my pen... I kept on making excuses. Finally my father had had enough, and gave me a spanking. As that friend of ours then told me after the war, there was no talking to him for the rest of the evening, because he just kept repeating, 'I spanked my little girl!' and couldn't get over it.

Otherwise, it was constant fun with our father. He was always making and playing jokes. I found out a lot about all the things he used to do from my parents' best friends. They were chemists and

left Prague in 1939, and via Poland and the Ukraine ended up in Siberia. In 1946 they returned home and were glad to find us here. When I left I was eleven, so I was glad that they told me something more about my parents. They for example told me that when they had visits over, they didn't have milk at home, because they didn't have children and liked to drink black coffee. Whereas my father liked a bit of milk. So he'd take a small bottle along with him, put it in his breast pocket and then take the cork out, like he was squirting the milk. So those were my father's little jokes; that was my father.

My mother's brother, Uncle Bedrich, was something similar. He was also immensely funny. He'd always say that he'd have to have this machine for spanking children made. He'd keep saying that they can't finish it, that this was missing and that was missing, that they can't deliver it yet... But that it would definitely arrive, and that then I'd get a proper licking. My uncle was always fooling around. Not my mother, as I've said, she was serious, but my father and uncle were big jokers.

My mother's lifetime achievement was a wall tapestry that she'd embroidered. Oddly enough, I got it back after the war. She also knitted my sister two sweaters, and that was the apex of her handiwork, she definitely wasn't the handiwork type. My parents liked attending the theater and operas. My father would often sing melodies from various arias, Carmen for example.

My parents didn't take me to the theater. Once or twice I might have gone to see Spejbl and Hurvinek 3 and that was it. Cinematography was in its beginnings during my childhood, and I was at the movies about twice. The first time was 'Snow White and the Seven Dwarves' at the Flora Theater, and then the Blanik Theater, to see 'Mickey Mouse.' I remember it to this day, amazing experiences. I couldn't attend the evening screenings because at home it was strictly seen to that I was in bed by 7pm. Always. I wasn't sleepy, but when it was seven, there was no mercy.

As children my sister and I would snap at each other every little while, argue and call each other names, because she had a red pencil case which even had a zipper, and I had a brown one that had no zipper. Dumb trivialities like this bothered me, even if mine was from much better leather, for example. But as a small child I was always ill, the flu and bronchitis and so on. At that moment my sister would of course have done anything for me, mostly [she'd bring me] glass figurines or something like that. So during that time we loved each other, but as soon as I got better, we'd be at each other again.

When we were in England, Mimka was more of a mother to me than a sister. I don't remember us ever arguing there. There were more of us who had a sibling in England, but I don't think that anyone had a sister like I did. She was absolutely unique in how she took care of me. As I say, she was an amazing person, she was exceptionally kind. Not only to me, she was willing to do anything for anyone. When she found out that someone wasn't well, right away she'd go bake something and take it to him and would look around at what she could arrange, help out with and so on. Many times it was even to the detriment of her own family. During the postwar years there was nothing, and we had double nothing. But my sister would have done anything for anyone. However, when she took a dislike to someone, they were finished. She'd no longer communicate with them. Either black or white.

Already as a small child my sister was interested in literature. She'd for example save up her pocket money and would spend it on having Jirasek bound in leather [Jirasek, Alois (1851-1930): Czech author and playwright]. I doubt she'd still do it today, but back then, yes. She was very

versatile, though not very into sports, but she was interested in music.

My sister and I played the piano. This young lady teacher used to come to our place, a saint, because it would have been hard to find someone as musically untalented as my sister and I. I loved her. She was amazingly patient with us. And it's true, that when I listen to music today, I enjoy piano most of all, so I guess something of it must have rubbed off on me.

When I was little, I wasn't really interested in anything very much. My parents were desperate, that I didn't like to read. Until once, I don't know how, I got hold of a book called 'Irca vede jedenactku' by some author named Hüttlova, one of those books for girls. Thanks to it I got into reading and today I can't imagine life without a book. But back then I was more likely to be jumping around somewhere, doing handstands and cartwheels. My father used to say, 'You're more on your hands and head than on your feet.' I attended rhythmics twice a week. But I didn't have any special interests as such.

My mother used to take me to my rhythmics class, which used to be on Narodni Avenue in Palac Metro. Beforehand, she'd always take me to the confectioner's and would buy us a pastry made with egg yolks. I had a terrible sweet tooth.

I had a total of twelve female and four male cousins, of that perhaps only one set of cousins was younger than me, otherwise they were all older than I, and I had to wear their hand-me-downs. That was normal back then, after all, you wouldn't throw something out if it could still be used for something, right? Otherwise I liked my cousins, it wasn't their fault, that's true, but it bothered me. The first time I got my own [new] things was only when I was going to England.

Because my cousins were older, I didn't associate with them very much. When someone is eight and someone else 16, that's a huge gulf. The one I liked the most and with whom I got along best was Vera, Uncle Bedrich's daughter. She was about nine months younger, and even though we didn't see each other that often because they lived in Dresden, Vera was the cousin I liked best. We loved each other. She was a terribly nice girl. When she was in Terezin [4] during the war, she went out with Alfred Kantor, a painter, whose pictures from Terezin were published in a book. They were very much in love. Vera didn't return from Auschwitz. Alfred did. Vera also had a sister, Eva, who was a day older than my sister. She didn't return either.

The school I attended wasn't far from where we lived, two tram stops; I used to walk there and would meet girlfriends on the way. When it was raining, I'd get 50 halers for the tram. Well, and for us the national sport was riding illegally for free. Not that I needed those 50 halers that much, but I probably did it just as a lark, on a dare, the same way as most kids do.

Rather than talk about what I liked in school, I'll tell you what I didn't like: handiwork. To this day I remember how in Grade 5 we had to knit a row of faggoting onto some apron. I was completely incompetent. So I took it home, but my mother was just as incompetent at it. Nevertheless she helped me with it somehow. So this definitely wasn't my favorite subject. I didn't like penmanship either. Otherwise I passed with more or less average marks, I always had at least one to three twos [out of five, roughly equivalent to between a B and a C], in penmanship and handiwork. I probably liked gym class the best.

Back then, girls' and boys' classes were separate of course. Religion didn't play a role in my choice of girlfriends. I was for example friends with Alena Hromadkova. Her father had some sort of important position in the Czech Brotherhood Evangelic Church [Editor's note: the Czech Evangelic Brotherhood Church is a Christian church in the Czech Republic. It is the largest Protestant church in the country]. In April 1945 she left with her entire family for Switzerland and then for America. I know that she then returned, but even though I tried, I never found her. Another was Vera Vrbenska. For a number of years during the war, she lived with her mother in a cellar, in hiding. When I returned from England, I attended high school for two years in Dejvice, where there was a class for repatriates. And Vera was there too. So once again we sat beside each other.

And then I had one more girlfriend; that one was Jewish, and left with me for England in 1939. Her name was Zuzka, and by chance we found each other and met up on 29th June 1989, so exactly 50 years later. That date was more or less a coincidence, but quite an important one for both of us. Zuzka brought along with her some letters that she'd received right after the war from another friend of ours, Ruzena Zelena. In them it said that she'd survived the concentration camps, thus she must have also been Jewish, and both of us were quite surprised, because we hadn't known that. You simply don't look for friends based on whether someone is a Jew or not. Some girl named Dorantova was in our class as well, she was also Jewish, but she didn't survive.

Everyone in our family was Jewish. At home we observed holidays, and that was the beginning and end of it. We definitely didn't do things like attend services during the week or keep kosher 5. We celebrated the New Year [Rosh Hashanah]; my parents would go to the synagogue, and perhaps I did too. For seder supper we'd go to Aunt Kamila's, and for Chanukkah we'd light candles. What really bothered me was that at Christmastime we weren't allowed to have a tree at home. So I'd go visit my girlfriends, and felt terribly sorry for myself.

Back then religion class was more or less compulsory in all schools, so I attended the Jewish one. We had it at a different school, at 'Na Smetance' I think. But I also had a number of other activities, I played the piano, did some gymnastics and so on and so on, well, and often I'd complain of headaches, which afflicts me to this day. So my parents decided that in order for me to not have such a load, it would be no problem for me to skip religion. So in Grade 5 I no longer attended it, and was very glad for it.

Our parents would always rent a room or two somewhere for the summer, and we'd spend the summer holidays there, along with one other family. Our fathers would be in Prague working, and only our mothers would keep an eye on us. My first memories are of Dobris, after that we'd mainly go to Mala Skala. We did a lot of walking around the 'Czech Eden' area. And when it was nice, we'd always be by the water, as for me, more like in the water, from morning till evening.

I don't know how my parents met this family. I remember them from times immemorial. They had two girls; the older one was the same age as my sister, and the younger one was a year older than I. I got along relatively well with 'mine,' we were friends, while my sister not so much with 'hers.' Their mother was Jewish. Their father wasn't, plus to top it off he was German. But as a family they were perfect. I used to go to their place at Christmas to see their tree. But then when the occupation 6 came, right away on the 16th or 17th of March, my father took me and we went to go have a look at where they lived. A swastika was hanging in their window. I can still see that horror to this day. No one had to explain anything to me, but a swastika, that was simply our biggest

enemy. I couldn't even swallow back then. After the war I found out that they'd tried to persuade him to get divorced, but he refused. This way he actually saved both his wife and daughters. They were in Terezin, but only for the last few months. As I say, for me it was a shock. I see it to this day. The flag was flying.

I'd say that my father was probably politically left-leaning, even though he definitely didn't belong to any organization. On the other hand, he was a member of the Freemasons, who definitely weren't some sort of leftists. But my sister was a member of one very left-leaning youth organization. They were named 'Rote Falken' 7, Red Falcons, so if our father allowed her this, he must have been somehow inclined towards it. Let's call it a social conscience. It was through these 'Rote Falken' that I actually got to England.

I remember that from the fall of 1938, some student used to come to our place once or twice a week for lunch. He was from the Sudetenland 8 or from Germany, and had come to Prague after Kristallnacht. I was naturally aware of the events of the late 1930s, even though as a girl of not even eleven, not to such an extent. I only more or less realized things in retrospect.

During the War

To this day I remember 15th March 1939 [the beginning of the occupation of the remainder of the Czech lands by Germany], it was a Wednesday and snow was falling. When we arrived by the water tower on Vinohradska Street, there were tanks sitting there. I'll never forget what it's like for a ten-year-old child to walk by tanks, when he has no idea why and what is going on, and now those muzzles are aiming at him. I walked by German soldiers, they had these hats with peaks on them. It didn't make a pleasant impression, definitely not. I know that back then people were saying that they were eating everything in the stores, mainly ham. My parents didn't tell me anything about the fact that they began to confiscate Jewish property, that they had to report, they protected me from that. Relatively recently I found in some documents that still before my departure my father also had to report his tiny little factory, his little workshop, and the correspondence was about that a 'Treuhänder' [a superintendent of Jewish property] would be installed there.

My parents apparently did what they could to protect me from everything unpleasant. When the opportunity arose for me to go to England, they said with a smile, 'That's amazing, you're so lucky, you'll go to England, we'd like that too, for sure you'll go to the sea.' They basically made it into something sensational for me, and I looked forward to it. Of course, not even they could suspect that we'd never see each other again, if they'd have suspected it, I don't know if they would have managed it. When it came down to the decision whether they should or shouldn't send my sister and me away, their best friends were persuading them to do it. They said, 'Look how they behaved to the Jews in Austria, what Kristallnacht in Germany was like, you can't expect anything good, let at least the girls be somewhere safe.' So in the end they convinced my parents, who then managed to serve it up to me like that with a smile.

Originally only I was supposed to go to England. As I've already said, my sister was a member of the 'Rote Falken' organization. Their leader traveled to England and there he made a connection with a similar organization, where he wrote a circular that here, in Czechoslovakia there was an entire number of endangered children whom it was necessary to get to England. He looked for people that would be willing to take some child in. I don't know why, but age-wise it was limited from 10 to 16, I think. My sister was 16 and a half, so didn't meet the conditions and I was

supposed to go in her place.

When I was leaving, there was nary a mention of her going too. By sheer chance she managed to leave on the next transport, and all because she attended a German high school. Our parents sent her there so that she'd learn to read and write German properly. In 1934 some girl from Germany joined their class, whose father, a journalist, was jailed in a concentration camp. My sister became friends with her, and she used to come to our place to visit, and in the summer would go with us to our summer apartment. Her mother was a children's doctor, and after they released her father from the concentration camp, the entire family left for England.

When I arrived in England, they were waiting for me at the train station. Later it dawned on me that it must have been they who made it possible for my sister to come. Because the condition for the children's transports was that each child had to have a place to stay. And because that lady was a doctor and my sister arrived in England and already had it arranged that she'd immediately begin studying at a hospital to be a nurse, she must apparently have been the one to have arranged it. So my sister arrived right on the next transport after mine. Conditions were getting tougher; while I was allowed to leave with 50 kilograms of luggage, she was only allowed to have 20. Those types of measures 9, where Jewish children weren't allowed to attend school, you weren't allowed to go to parks, to the movies, we luckily didn't have the chance to experience here.

So I was being prepared for my departure with a smile, I got a new dress and so on, so it was terribly exciting for me. As I say, I had lots to look forward to. I left on 29th June 1939. It was a Thursday, and by coincidence school had ended that day, so I'd completed exactly five grades of elementary school. A short distance from where we lived, they sold exceptionally good Italian ice cream. My mother wasn't otherwise very into sweets, but this ice cream she liked very much. We'd go there often. I was this type that ate things slowly, while my sister had to eat everything right away. And my mother took me there again as a farewell treat. She bought me a big scoop of ice cream, plus whipped cream on top, all told it cost two crowns, which was a lot of money back then. [Editor's note: In 1929 the Czech crown was defined by law to be equivalent to 44.58 mg of gold.]

Then in the afternoon our Dresden cousins came to say goodbye. By then my suitcases were probably already at the train station, and all I took with me onto the train was a rucksack; however, back then a rucksack was something different than it is today, back then it was this ordinary cloth sack. Grandma gave me a half kilo of apricots for the trip. At that time it was still quite early for apricots, they must have been imported. I said goodbye to her at home, and only my parents and sister accompanied me to the train station; we left around 7:00 pm.

In England

Today I can still see little girls clutching their dolls, little boys their teddy bears, and so on... Their fathers were trying at the last minute to teach them some English word or something similar. And everyone always: 'Write, write!' Then suddenly I saw those friends of my parents'. At that time they were already in hiding, but they also came to say goodbye to me. Well, and then it was time to get on the train. I remember sitting by the window. Everyone had their necks craned out the window, and as soon as the train started moving, I saw that my father started weeping. He simply could no longer hold it in, no one had any idea for how long we were saying goodbye. My last words to him were, 'Dad, don't blubber here and don't embarrass me!' That was the last thing I said to him.

Today, when I put myself in my parents' shoes, a shiver runs down my back. When someone comes to see me and says, 'Jesus, what all you had to live through,' I say, 'I? Not at all, but my parents did.' I was always protected in some way. I was lucky that in England I came to stay with a very good family, and all my life my sister watched over me. I never knew what it was like to not have love all around me. I never had the feeling that I was unwanted, which is very important. For example, that friend of mine from elementary school, the one that also went to England, ended up in a family that didn't want her very much. Not nearly everyone had as much luck as I did.

My parents would of course have liked to have emigrated, if it would have been possible. Alas, it wasn't. Though as late as 1940, some people managed to get out, but they didn't. Years ago, when I was looking through the letters I had received while in England, I found a letter from my uncle, in which he wrote that my cousin Vera was supposed to leave on the September transport and that she'd be in Newcastle. That was the largest transport, and almost 300 children were supposed to leave on it. Alas the war broke out, and the transport didn't leave. As far as I know, none of those children survived, and neither did Vera. Aside from my sister and me, only about two other distant relatives managed to emigrate, one relative survived the concentration camps, and that's all; the rest of our family perished. Most of them in Auschwitz, and my grandmother in Treblinka.

I took 'Granny' by Bozena Nemcova 10 with me to England. That piano teacher of ours had given it to me, and I've got it to this day. Otherwise I don't even know what else. Clothes, practical things like that. Actually, up until my arrival in England, I didn't know where I'd be going. The Prague leader of 'Rote Falken' was waiting for our group of about fifteen children with an English colleague of his, and they then took us to this camp in eastern England, where we were supposed to get acclimatized, so to say. It was this gift from them, very kind, nice, we slept in tents. Friends of my parents were in England, and because my birthday was coming up, they came to see me there. I remember that they brought ice cream, the kind in wafers, similar to our Russian ice cream, they brought more, so that there'd be enough for everyone, we liked it very much.

Then we went to stay with families, but my family didn't have a bed for me yet, so for a few days I was with another family that lived nearby. This family also took in one girl, her name was Lia or Lea, and she was from the Sudetenland. I remember it as if it were yesterday: I went to the bathroom, and when I returned the girl was weeping profusely. I asked her what had happened, and she said, 'I'm homesick.' Suddenly I was homesick too. So we had a duo, a vale of tears.

We both wrote anguished letters home, as to how homesick we were. And that we'd cross the sea and I don't know what all. I threw the letter in a mailbox and already felt better, I no longer thought about it. A few days later I got an anguished letter from my mother, who was all upset, saying that I'd get used to it soon. And that she hadn't shown Father the letter yet. Then all my aunties began writing to calm me down. As I've said, I'd long since already forgotten about it. My mother showed my father the letter only once I began writing normal letters again. A child doesn't realize at all what all he can cause, what it must be like for his parents. No one harmed a hair on my head. Soon I went to stay with my family.

They were young, pleasant, kind people who had a four-month-old baby. I had my own beautiful and large room, which by then also had that bed. I learned the language relatively quickly, and even though age-wise I was supposed to be in Grade 6, I began attending Grade 5, because it was taught by the sister of the lady with whom I was living. She devoted herself to me immensely,

especially after class, and so when in May of 1940 I went to stay with another family in northern England, no one could believe that I wasn't English.

This family lived near London, so I could see my sister, who was working in a hospital in London. I think that once every 14 days she had the entire day off, so we'd get together every second Saturday. It was a short way by bus and then the subway, plus I paid half fare. The little tiny bit of pocket money that my sister got, she gave it all to me. Either for the movies, for ice cream, or something like that, to make me happy. Which she really did. While all that time, as I found out years later, she was always hungry in that hospital. But instead of buying something for herself, she invested everything into me.

But then May 1940 came, and the man from the family I lived with had to join the army, so I could no longer stay there. They were expecting another child, they wouldn't have gotten any support for me, and the support that soldiers got was so little that they could barely live on it themselves, when on top of that they had to pay a mortgage. So I had to move. At that time they also fired my sister from the hospital, because she was a foreigner. Those were exceptional cases, and she was one of them, she was literally suddenly out on the street. Later it came out that due to the poor conditions in which she lived, she got tuberculosis.

My next family was a childless pair in their forties, they were kind, but how should I say it, these simple people. I did have my own room, but their little house had no washroom. They used to go to some sort of public bath house. The town had a very strong Jewish community, which, when they learned that a Jewish child was living in a Gentile family, could not leave it at that. I had no problem with it. Due to their efforts, I ended up with another family, this time a Jewish one. Which wouldn't have been a problem, but they were really very Orthodox. They had emigrated either from Lithuania or Latvia in 1917, and now they were around 60. I wasn't at all used to their lifestyle, I knew only the most important holidays. And now this.

I remember that on Friday afternoon I had to for example tear up newspapers for the toilet, because on Saturday you weren't even allowed to tear paper. You weren't allowed to carry a handkerchief in your pocket, you had to tie it onto your wrist like this. And many similar details. I'd never heard of anything similar in my life, but I soon adapted, a child of 12 or 13 is malleable. Mainly I was convinced that if I did and observed all this, I'd thereby save my parents.

Once it happened that the building where we lived was bombed, and we had to move somewhere else. I didn't see my sister very often, as the town where I was living was quite far from London. My sister didn't have the money to come, so she wanted me to come see her, as I paid half fare. But this family said no way, London's also being bombed, we can't take responsibility for that, that if something happened, that they were responsible for me. And they kept saying no, no, it's not possible. Until my sister apparently realized what the main reason was, and then once wrote that some rabbi was living beside her, with whom I could live, and for me to come for Christmas. Suddenly it was possible.

So I went to see my sister in London for Christmas, it was a Friday evening. Of course the trains were late, it was wartime, and it was already dark. We found ourselves right away, we hadn't seen each other for a year and a half, maybe longer. And the first thing I said was, 'Here's my suitcase, carry it for me.' Because I wasn't allowed to carry them, but she - a Jewish woman - could. [Editor's note: "could" carry them because she wasn't observing Jewish laws regarding the Sabbath.] My

sister just gasped, but grabbed the suitcase.

We arrived at the hostel where she was living along with some other Czechs. And now we were supposed to eat something. But I refused to eat anything that wasn't kosher, and there wasn't much there that was kosher. My sister was tired, so we went to sleep, and I told her, 'Switch off the light for me.' Because I wasn't allowed to switch off the light. So I turned her into my flunky. My sister bore it, said ha, ha, ha, he, he, he, but it was this pretend laughter. This nervous laughter. I was 13 and a half and she was 19, and was responsible for me. She may have been pretending to laugh, but she must have been completely devastated.

The rabbi, as it turned out was this rabbi in quotation marks. Does the name Lüben mean anything to you? He used to be a very important Prague rabbi, and this was his grandson or nephew. However no Orthodox Jew, not even close. And then we were sitting at the table, and I didn't take a thing. I don't know whether I maybe ate dry bread, I don't remember any more. I know that they had kosher margarine there, but only because it was cheaper. Someone did some baking and brought vanilla crescents, and I didn't take a thing. I was salivating, but I was disciplined. But then I sat down beside this Lüben and watched him stuffing himself with everything. The next day he was alive, there was nothing wrong with him, he'd survived it all. And then it was Christmas Eve or Christmas Day, and roast goose with dumplings and cabbage had been prepared. Well, kosher or not, I could no longer stand it. Thus it was that my great Orthodoxy fell partially by the wayside.

Besides these customs of mine, my sister was aghast at something else: I was forgetting Czech. When I arrived for my visit, I spoke with an English accent, searched for words and so on. Because she'd learned that there was a Czechoslovak state school in England, she arranged for me to start there. The school that I started attending had originally been set up for the children of government officials, soldiers and airmen, which is why there weren't that many children in it at the beginning. Their numbers gradually started increasing, and so the capacity of the school at Henton Hall was no longer sufficient, plus it was in quite poor shape, which was the reason why we moved to Wales in the fall of 1943.

At boarding school

We were given a former hotel, which had now been converted to a boarding school. It's hard to say exactly how many of us children were there in total. Someone would arrive, someone would leave, graduate, or if he had parents in England, they'd take him and put him into an English school for his last year, so that he'd learn at least a bit of English. I think that there could have been about 150 of us, but that's an estimate. Recently we were discussing how many of us had been Winton's 11 children and someone said that it might have been about 25 percent. It's possible. Thanks to the fact that we were in that school together, we knew about each other. Nothing is known about many other children that Winton saved, and it's hard to search something out.

The countryside there was beautiful. We barely knew there was a war going on, so we were protected in this aspect as well. But for a few exceptions, I think that everyone liked it there, we were very happy there. There were no differences among us, not even in whether someone had parents in England or not. I remember that we had this one boy there, whose father was in the army and his mother had moved to the village where the school was for a short while. But the principal didn't allow her to come visit the boy, because the other children didn't have the possibility of seeing their mothers, so that they wouldn't be sad. The two of them used to meet

secretly, but the principal simply didn't want such differences to exist among us.

Also for example the children who had someone in England would from time to time get a package with goodies and so on from them. However, my two best friends and I had no one to send us anything. But one day the mail was being given out and I also got a package. It had no return address, and inside there was a roast chicken and some apples. As I later found out, the principal's secretary was behind this surprise. He'd apparently noticed that we three girls never received anything, and knew that we'd share. Which we of course also did. Each of us remembers to this day how we took that chicken, went in front of the school where there was this open area, a lawn, gnawed at the chicken and threw the bones behind us.

When school was out we'd sometimes borrow a bike and ride around in the hills, especially on weekends. The countryside there is beautiful, gorgeous. The property also had a lake, so it was nice for a walk of 20 minutes or so. The boys had their soccer team, and we girls played volleyball, handball or ping-pong. We spent a lot of time playing sports. Each Saturday evening there'd be some sort of program, and someone had to prepare it, usually the older ones took care of it. It was quite varied, from dance parties, listening to gramophone records through various quizzes, plays, Czech ones as well as English, or discussions. We'd discuss various subjects, the equality of women, about what would be once we returned...

Teaching at this school must have been very demanding. Not only were there no textbooks and the teachers had to write them themselves, but we had also arrived there with very different levels of knowledge. Children may be quick to learn, but they are even quicker to forget, so we'd forgotten a lot of Czech. What's more, we were also all at different levels in different subjects. The school that I'd been attending before this one had very low standards, and even though I'm not the studious type, there I excelled. There they taught only the most basic of the basics. But here it was something different, and I had a lot of catching up to do. For example, I and one other girl in my class had never studied French, while the other children knew it, plus a number of them had arrived in England via France. Even English each one of us spoke differently. The same went for history, geography and mathematics. So to meld all this was no easy task. Disregarding the fact that we were adolescents, far from our parents. Nothing immoral took place, but we did get up to all sorts of mischief.

Once for example, I got a two in conduct. I had a very kind Latin teacher, but she was this type that wasn't capable of keeping order, plus she had a speech impediment. When someone didn't know a word, she'd always say, 'All right, so three times!', which meant writing the word three times. Of course, I never knew the words, so I'd say, 'Three times!' right off the bat. But she got mad and said, 'No, five times!' So the next time I said, 'Three times or five times?' And she: 'Ten times!' So that's what sort of child I was, that's how we amused ourselves.

Once some of us got into a big pickle. Our educators included a Catholic and Protestant priest and a rabbi. The rabbi's name was Stransky. Well, and the Catholic priest used to have his things for services stored in this one shed by the lake where otherwise they kept boats. Some of the boys managed to get inside, and what didn't they do? They drank the wine used for services. It ended up being a big scandal. The interesting thing is, that while the Catholic priest would have been willing to take it as a bit of mischief, the rabbi vehemently insisted on strict punishment. One of the students at our school was also Julius Sidon, the half-brother of the current Prague rabbi, and I

think it was he that ended up getting punished. Even though probably unjustly, he may not even have been there, but someone said he'd done it, and so he ended up getting blamed for it.

Another trick we played was when airmen came to do their high school leaving exams. They were heroes, but before the exam they were all nervous.... like everyone. That day some of the guys swapped the signs for the bathroom and the principal's office. And when the airmen went to the bathroom, they'd open the door and there'd be the principal sitting behind his desk. Those were the kinds of things we used to do...

My sister was attending nursing school in England, but alas she didn't finish it, they threw her out. Then she worked at the editorial offices of some Czech or Czechoslovak magazine, but because it was wartime and everyone had to help out in the war effort, she went to work at a munitions factory. Right before the war ended, while she was still in England, she married a Czech soldier.

We were able to stay in touch with our parents only up till the war broke out, so those [first] two months. Then we kept writing with the help of their friends in Holland, but it took a terribly long time for an answer to come back, plus Holland also fell not even a year later. Then there was also the possibility of keeping in touch via the Red Cross, but even including a so-called paid reply, you could write a maximum of 25 words. What can you fit into 25 words? We're fine, we're healthy, and that's about it. After our parents left for Terezin in November 1942, we had no more news of them.

I think that sometime around 1944, the English newspapers began writing about the cruelties taking place in concentration camps. But I guess youth has some sort of protective filter, and I simply couldn't admit to myself that it could have anything to do with my parents. I wasn't even sure whether they even were in a concentration camp. Overall, few people in English society believed that something like that could be possible. In 1945, after the war ended, the school received long lists of those that had survived. Each one of us stood there and looked for someone. I don't remember it much, but a number of my classmates do. My best friend, Vera Diamantova, also got a telegram, that her mother and aunt had survived. We were all overjoyed for her. But not even a month later she got another message, that her mother had died during a death march [12].

After the War

By June of 1945 my sister had already returned to Czechoslovakia. Because she'd taken some sort of quick course in chemistry in England, she was able go to Terezin and help there with delousing and the typhus epidemic. At the same time she tried to find out who in our family had survived. There were places, like for example U Hybernu in Prague, where long lists for survivors hung. People would pin up notes by names like: 'I'm alive.', 'Frank, contact us at such and such address.', and so on. A lot of people searched and for a long time. Every little while the radio broadcast information... there were many ways to help people find each other. Sometimes people found each other, but more often they didn't. Our school repatriated us at the end of August 1945. By then my sister knew that as far as she knew no one had survived. Which however didn't mean that someone couldn't have appeared later; alas no one appeared, not even later.

People who returned from the war and had no place to go were given shelter in some homes, and even we, who were returning from England and had no one here, were supposed to go to some orphanage. Back then my sister walked daily from the last tram stop in Liboc to the airport in order to not miss me, because what could have then happened was that they'd have stuck me in one of

those homes, and she wouldn't have known where to look for me, nor would have I. So she walked to the airport every day, and by then she was already pregnant. I arrived on Monday, and the Friday before that my future sister-in-law, which no one knew yet back then, also flew in from England. She and my sister knew each other, and it was from her that Mimka found out that I'd arrive on Monday, so it was only that Saturday and Sunday that she didn't go to the airport.

The return to Czechoslovakia was a complete shock. Much worse than the departure for England. For one there was no one here; aside from my sister and me no one from our family had survived the war. My parents had been deported to Terezin, and my father had continued on to Auschwitz on 28th September 1944. But they didn't take women into that transport. And all the while they had so desperately wanted to accompany their men! No one knew what awaited them in Poland, that is, aside from the fact that it was most likely even worse than in Terezin. They didn't know about the extermination camps. My mother also wanted to follow my father, and left on 1st October [1944]. Whether they met again, I don't know, it's likely that when she arrived in Auschwitz, he was no longer alive.

Another thing was that I was 17 and up till then had been used to someone taking care of me. Either in that family or at school, but now, here, all that was over. We had absolutely nothing. Nowhere to live, nowhere to sleep, nothing. Worries came, where to get money, where to get food coupons, who will give you [financial] support, what school to attend. Now to at least graduate from high school... And no one told anyone anything. No one gave you advice. I understand, it was the end of the war, and everyone had heaps of worries, but that officials could have been a bit accommodating to those who had survived, and especially to us children, no. On the contrary, everyone tried to grab what they could for themselves. From apartments left behind by Germans, and wherever else, everyone was very sharp that way. But that didn't even occur to us, we who had lived in England for so long and were used to true honesty. So it for example took a very long time before we were assigned an apartment, even though as a soldier my brother-in-law had priority.

For the first four months or so I slept where I could. Basically wherever there was a free bed and they'd let me sleep in it, whether I knew them or not. Then finally my brother-in-law also got an apartment and so I lived with them. It was this on the whole nice two-room bachelor apartment, and four of us lived there, aside from me, my pregnant sister and my brother-in- law, also his sister, who'd returned from Sweden. She then soon found a place to rent somewhere, but not long after that the baby was born. Everything was a problem, finding a bed, a blanket, a plate or a pot. The stores were empty, the times were truly hard.

Everyone was convinced that we must have brought back God knows what from our stay in England. Well, we didn't, certainly not my sister and I. We really did have only the utter necessities. I gave my orphan's pension to my sister for the household, it was next to nothing anyways, and I gave English lessons. Money couldn't buy you anything, because there was nothing, so at least so that I'd have tram fare. It definitely wasn't easy.

Sometime around Christmas 1945 I again went to visit that family where I used to go to see their tree before the war. When you walked in, you entered a hall, where this large table stood. And now I look and see my mother's brocade tablecloth on that table. And that wasn't all, I also saw a sewing box that had belonged to my mother at their place. So I said, 'Hey, that's my mother's!' If

they'd at least had the sense to hide it, knowing I was coming over. But no, instead they said, 'Your mother gave that to us when she was leaving for Terezin. So that we'd send them packages.' It's possible. Probably. Whether they sent them or not, I don't know. But I remember that back then it really bothered me that they left those things there, when they knew I was coming. All I got back from them were family photographs, those they didn't need.

When she returned, my sister tried to find out where our parents had hidden things. Our parents had probably left a letter with someone, in which they described where things were. Afterwards, my sister told me about having been here and there, and who had refused to return something.

Aside from the photographs, after the war we also got back a Meissen porcelain dining set for twelve, which my uncle had given my mother as a wedding gift. He'd purchased it for a pittance when there had been high inflation in Germany. My uncle had been a photographer, and during the war some other photographer had probably employed him in his studio in Tyl Square. Illegally, because Jews weren't allowed to be employed. In 1946 this one young man came to see us, I don't even know how he found us, that he was working for a photographer, and that we should come see him, because he had something for us. I went to see him, and it turned out that my uncle had hidden these things there with him. Aside from the dining set also two Meissen porcelain figurines and some glasses, which had unfortunately broken. But these people kept even the shards, so that they could return them to us. After the war they started searching for someone from our family, and found out that only my sister and I had returned. They searched for us for a whole year, and I don't even know how they finally managed to find us.

I think that it's absolutely unique that there existed such honest people that expended so much effort to return those things to us properly. While people who knew us, knew that we'd returned from England with nothing, denied everything. I didn't care about the value of that porcelain, for me the value consisted in that it was basically the only thing of my parents' that I had left.

Another example of an honest person was my piano teacher. When I met up with her after the war, she was all unhappy, because apparently one time my father had asked her if she could take care of some ring. But she took fright and refused, if they found it at her place, how would such a poor girl have come by such an expensive ring? Then she felt very guilty about it, that we would have had at least that. She was also all concerned about the fact that someone else had hidden two bars of soap with her. But that person hadn't returned, and so she didn't know what to do with them. So there were honest people to be found, but they were few, very few.

I met my future husband, Robert Klima, four days before my departure from England. He was also a Jew, and along with his brother had emigrated via Poland. In November 1941 he joined the Czechoslovak army and when the war ended, he returned to the islands; they'd gotten a week's holidays to take core of personal matters. I knew his sister, at that time she had a ten- month-old baby and the two of us met at her place. For me it was love at first sight, but he had some Englishwoman. He wanted to talk her into going to Czechoslovakia with him, but she didn't want to go. We didn't meet again until we were in Prague.

After the war I did another two years of high school. I attended a so- called repatriation class, which meant that everyone there was missing a year or two. They'd either been doing forced labor, then there was one young man who'd been in Terezin, and there were about two classmates who had been in England with me. Everyone thought that because I'd returned from England that I must

have who knows what, all sorts of clothes...

I know that there weren't any dance classes during the war. And so the mother of one of my classmates decided that we'd attend dance classes together, that she'd take me with them and that she'd be a sort of chaperone for me. I thanked them nicely, saying that I couldn't go anywhere because I didn't have a dress to wear. She couldn't understand that at all, I, who'd come from England. But I really didn't have anything. Not only had everything there been rationed, we didn't even have any way to get those rations, because we had no money. We did get a bit of pocket money from a fund that was called the Czechoslovak Trust Fund, none of us remembers how much it was any longer, but that was just about enough for toothpaste, and maybe some postage stamps. Most of my clothing were secondhand things my sister had gotten from people who no longer wanted them. We were also able to go to the Red Cross, but I was there perhaps only once, for some knitted blankets. Then I unraveled them, the wool got used for something else, which I still have, I think.

Basically no one was capable of comprehending that we were really badly off financially. I was this outsider. Years later, when we had a class reunion from that postwar high school, one classmate, who had emigrated after 1948 and had ended up in Vienna, told me that it was only now that she understood what it must have been like, how I must have felt, when I'd returned as an emigrant. And in order for her to understand it, she also had to become an emigrant, besides her no one else understood it. I lived a life completely different from others.

I also recall one incident with our Czech teacher. Once she gave us an assignment to write a composition on the subject of Czech theater during the occupation. I went to see her, and told her that I couldn't write about it, because I hadn't been here, I didn't know anything about it, and didn't know where to find information... She sloughed me off, saying that I had the radio. That I can listen to the radio. But I didn't have even a radio, I didn't have any home, nothing... So she was extremely unpleasant, and of course it hurt me a lot that she didn't have even a bit of sympathy for me. It didn't even occur to me to tell her my story, about how I had lived or was living.

Then, about 20 years later, I found out that she was also Jewish and that she'd also been in a concentration camp. So I think that she basically had the feeling that I must have been extremely well off in England, while she'd been in that concentration camp. Well, I had been well off, definitely compared to her. There's not doubt about that. On the other hand, she should have realized that I'd been left with no parents, and that my life was no bed of roses either. I guess she wanted to vent some of that anger at me.

After finishing high school I went to university. The Faculty of Education was starting a department for nursery school teachers; I liked children, but teaching elementary school or junior high... I said to myself that if someone was to annoy me like I did that Latin teacher, I didn't want that. What's more, at that time I was already in a serious relationship, and knew that there'd be a wedding soon. Later I completed my teaching degree for elementary school.

Our wedding was in April 1948. I worked for a year at a nursery school, and then our first child was born. My husband worked for the Ministry of Foreign Trade, and in 1951 they threw him out. More or less because he was a Jew, though they didn't say that directly. They threw out a lot of people along with him, in the end he was lucky that they didn't throw him in jail. Plus at that time we had very serious worries about where to live. The notice that we'd been assigned an apartment had

been delivered to the wrong address, and so we never got it.

Back then there was also this campaign called 'Action 77,000' 13 taking place, which was actually a disguised method of getting inconvenient people, intellectuals, into the factories. My husband started working at what were back then the Stalin Works, today the Litvinov Chemical Works, and we were assigned an apartment in Teplice, later one in Litvinov, where our daughter was born. I call it a second exile. As a reaction to the 1953 currency reform 14, a strike took place at their company, everyone went on strike, but only he was immediately fired because of it. Why? A Jew and on top of that he'd served in the Western army. So he went to work in the mines and his health suffered as a result.

We of course tried very hard to get back to Prague, which was impossible. They didn't give you an apartment if you didn't have a job, and they didn't give you a job if you didn't have a permanent address. Just like during feudal times, a vicious circle. Luckily my mother-in-law had a bachelor apartment in Prague, and my husband lived with her for some time and thanks to that found a job. He did translations, first for Sentinel, which were the State Technical Literature Publishers, then freelance. Our whole family was able to return to Prague and 'breathe freely' again.

I then worked for six years at Artia, a printing company, and I liked this work probably the best. But after the occupation 15 I became a persona non grata and got fired. I looked around for something to do, and found work at a lung clinic in Veleslavin, where I was a girl Friday. I did everything from translating scientific articles to going to the post office. But then my husband fell ill, and as soon as it was possible I retired, so that I could take care of him. Alas, that lasted for only a couple of months, as he soon died.

I then gave English lessons, which still I do to this day. My other activities consist of traveling around schools, either with the director, Mr. Minac or with someone else, when they show the film 'The Power of Good' [Editor's note: The Power of Good - Nicholas Winton (2001): A documentary film about Nicholas Winton, who just prior to the outbreak of World War II saved hundreds of mainly Jewish children from the Nazis. Directed by Matej Minac (b. 1961), the film was the first Czech film to be nominated for the international Emmy award], and talk about my experiences and feelings. In this way I'm at least partly paying off my debt.

To my shame, I was also in the Communist Party. I joined it in 1946, when I was 18. As I've said, my sister was also quite left-leaning, and joined the Party while still in England, and I was quite influenced by her. A lot of people truly and honestly believed in the idea; we thought that they could help us. Alas, that was not the case. Even the turning point that was 1948 16 was something that I realized only later, once my eyes began opening with the passage of time. The fact that many of our friends from England were jailed or had to emigrate was also a factor.

We definitely didn't consider emigrating in 1948. We'd just gotten married, and didn't realize what was going to be happening. We didn't want to emigrate. In 1968 I seriously considered it. Our son was in England at that time, for one to learn the language, and for another he'd managed to land a summer job, which was unusual. When the invasion took place, we were spending the summer with our family and one of my son's French friends somewhere past Chrudim. The boy expressed an interest in seeing Prague, and our daughter was supposed to show him around, though I don't know how, as she didn't know French and he didn't know Czech. Early in the morning, my husband put them on the bus, and returned saying that the Russians were occupying us. I was shocked that he

even let the two of them get on the bus, nevertheless the two of us also got on the first available means of transport and set off for Prague. That was something, transit wasn't working, we arrived at Florenc, and there was shooting everywhere... It was more than an adventure.

I left it up to my husband as to whether we should emigrate or not. I'm the type that first says or does something, and thinks about it only afterwards. Whereas my husband was always deliberate, and carefully thought out every step he took, which is why I left him to decide for us. He thought about it for a very long time, and then said no. Not another emigration. My husband was 48, I was 40, and basically our only qualifications were that we spoke the language [English]. That would have been an advantage at first, but you couldn't make a living with it. All right, others had done it, but it involved a great risk that we didn't intend on taking. Our son didn't want to stay in England, and returned.

The first year here wasn't so bad. The euphoria of the Prague Spring 17 still lingered. A year later, when they really began clamping down, it was worse. The way my husband was persecuted in the 1950s, I was persecuted in the 1960s. I was let go from Artia and on that occasion I said to one 'comrade': 'In 1944 my parents went into the gas. In the 1950s my husband was fired with an hour's notice, now I'm getting an 11-month layoff notice. That's incredible progress, my children have even greater hopes.'

My children were probably like most children. They just swapped roles. Jirka [Jiri] was always kind and mild, while Vera was this little rascal. She exercised, exercised, exercised a lot, did gymnastics, competitively as well. Our son liked to ski, and up until the age of 14, 15 he read a lot, then he somehow stopped enjoying it. Jirka studied electronics, our daughter wanted to attend university, but because of my 'problems' she wasn't given the chance. My children know that they are of Jewish origin, but we didn't bring them up in any consciously Jewish manner. We never observed any Jewish holidays at home.

During totalitarian times, Vera used to meet with a group of young Jewish people, called Deti Maislovky. [Editor's note: Deti Maislovky (Maisel Street Children): young Jewish people who prior to 1968 associated with each other on the basis of their belonging to the Prague Jewish community.] They were children who identified with being Jewish. They used to meet spontaneously to have fun, talk... They may have celebrated some holidays, like Chanukkah for example, but it definitely wasn't anything religious, more of a friendly get-together.

We used to go on vacations according to our financial means; a couple of times we were at this company cottage somewhere near the Ohra, also in Libverda, in Jevany... Mainly around Bohemia, nothing much else was even possible, and we didn't have the money anyways. I didn't get to the West until long years later in the 1960s; first Jirka went to England to work in 1966, then my husband in 1967, I in 1968, and finally Vera a year after me. Then it was impossible once again, only in 1976 my husband and I by miracle managed to travel abroad after giving an oath [to return], but that was an exception.

In 1980 we left one more time, on an invitation, by then my husband was already ill. It was more or less this parting with his brother, who lived in the United States; we met up in England. And in 1985 there was a class reunion of my old school, in which I also managed to participate. That was our first reunion, 40 years later, and it was amazing. Absolutely fantastic, unbelievable. I had the feeling that we hadn't seen each other for four weeks; those who haven't experienced something

similar can't comprehend it. Old friendships were immediately renewed, an amazing experience.

We made lifelong friendships at that school. My best friend, Vera Gissing, back then Diamantova, returned to Czechoslovakia after the war, but then re- emigrated to England. We have a friendship that you won't find just like that. I know that if I rang at her door at two, at three in the morning, she'd do anything for me. And I'd to the same for her. And not only she, and not only for her, there are exceptionally strong bonds amongst all of us, because our fates were so closely wedded during such a critical time of our youth.

The narrator of the film 'The Power of Good' is Joe Schlesinger, today a world-famous journalist. He's retired now, but is still active, and lives in Canada now. I was in the United States two and a half years ago, near New York, and he redid his whole program because of me, he had to cancel a TV crew, an interview with who knows how many ambassadors, and came to see me. That's not something someone would do just like that, is it? It again testifies to the bonds that exist among us.

Some of my classmates remained abroad after the war, some of us that had returned emigrated once again. And now we're scattered around the whole world. Literally. In Tasmania, in Israel, in the United States, in England of course... what's interesting is that none of Winton's children are in France. One of our classmates is there, but he wasn't among those whose life Winton saved. So, a person can travel all over the world, as long as he's got money, and everywhere he's got the feeling that he's welcome, that he's not imposing, that people are glad to see him.

It was my friend Vera who wrote me that Nicholas Winton was the one behind our transports. She then arrived here with a video cassette with that English program. A few of us got together here and watched it, along with my daughter and grandson. And to my embarrassment I have to admit that they realized more than I did what it actually contained, contains, what it's about. My grandson had just turned eleven, and although back then he didn't know English yet, his eyes flowed with tears. My daughter as well, because she realized that it affected many children of her son's age.

I met Mr. Winton for the first time in 1990, when we had a school reunion in Wales. He came there. By coincidence he lives not far from Vera, in England, so always when I go there to visit her, I see him. He's an enchanting man, who will be 97 in May [2006]. And he's immensely mentally spry, active... to an unbelievable degree. In May he may come to Prague again, the director Mr. Minac is preparing some sort of continuation of the film about Winton's children, more of us have cropped up.

And what's my relationship to Israel like? Well, I'm definitely not a Zionist 18, not in the least. I consider it to be the homeland of the Jews, which however doesn't mean that I think that every Jew should live there. If he wants to, of course. And because Jews have been struggling and laboring for this tiny state of theirs, they toiled quite a lot there to make something of that infertile soil, I think that they're very much entitled to be left alone there to live in peace. They don't deny the Palestinians the right to live there too, alongside them, but they have to leave them be.

I was in Israel once, only once, still during totalitarian times actually, and the moment the plane touched down, it had a very strong effect on me. I can't express it, but it was a very, very strong feeling. I had the impression that I belonged there, that it's my home, but I can't imagine living

there. I never even really considered emigrating there. The possibility didn't even present itself. Perhaps right after the war, but I had wanted to leave England and go home, to Czechoslovakia. Then actually in 1975, when we had our first school reunion, some classmates living in Israel offered to help me with this. But I said thank you very much, but I've already got children, family here... At that age it's hard for a person to change his roots and I don't even know if I'd want it. To have a look, of course, but to live there?

Glossary:

1 Kristallnacht

Nazi anti-Jewish violence on the night of 10th November 1938. The official pretext was the assassination two days earlier in Paris of Ernst vom Rath, third secretary of the German embassy, by a Polish Jew named Herschel Grynszpan. In an increasing atmosphere of tension engineered by the Germans, widespread attacks took place on Jews, Jewish property and synagogues throughout Germany and Austria. Shops were destroyed; warehouses, homes and synagogues were set on fire or otherwise destroyed. Many windows were broken and the night of violence thus became known as Kristallnacht (Crystal Night, or the Night of Broken Glass). At least 30,000 Jews were arrested and sent to concentration camps in Sachsenhausen, Buchenwald and Dachau. Though the German government attempted to present it as a spontaneous protest and punishment on the part of the Aryan, i.e., non- Jewish population, it was, in fact, carried out by order of the Nazi leaders. 2 Skoda Company: Car factory, the foundations of which were laid in 1895 by the mechanics V. Laurin and V. Klement with the production of Slavia bicycles. Just before the end of the 19th century they began manufacturing motor cycles and, in 1905, they started manufacturing automobiles. The name Skoda was introduced in 1925. Having survived economic difficulties, the company made a name for itself on the international market even within the constraints of the Socialist economy. In 1991 Skoda became a joint stock company in association with Volkswagen.

3 Spejbl and Hurvinek

two puppet figures, father and son, representing the conflicting world view of two generations. Spejbl first appeared on the scene in 1920, Hurvinek in 1926. They play the main roles in civilian and fantastical stories and in visual presentations they philosophize as commentators about fundamental questions of life. 4 Terezin/Theresienstadt: A ghetto in the Czech Republic, run by the SS. Jews were transferred from there to various extermination camps. The Nazis, who presented Theresienstadt as a 'model Jewish settlement,' used it to camouflage the extermination of European Jews. Czech gendarmes served as ghetto guards, and with their help the Jews were able to maintain contact with the outside world. Although education was prohibited, regular classes were held, clandestinely. Thanks to the large number of artists, writers, and scholars in the ghetto, there was an intensive program of cultural activities. At the end of 1943, when word spread of what was happening in the Nazi camps, the Germans decided to allow an International Red Cross investigation committee to visit Theresienstadt. In preparation, more prisoners were deported to Auschwitz, in order to reduce congestion in the ghetto. Dummy stores, a café, a bank, kindergartens, a school, and flower gardens were put up to deceive the committee.

5 Kashrut in eating habits

Kashrut means ritual behavior. A term indicating the religious validity of some object or article according to Jewish law, mainly in the case of foodstuffs. Biblical law dictates which living creatures are allowed to be eaten. The use of blood is strictly forbidden. The method of slaughter is prescribed, the so-called shechitah. The main rule of kashrut is the prohibition of eating dairy and meat products at the same time, even when they weren't cooked together. The time interval between eating foods differs. On the territory of Slovakia six hours must pass between the eating of a meat and dairy product. In the opposite case, when a dairy product is eaten first and then a meat product, the time interval is different. In some Jewish communities it is sufficient to wash out one's mouth with water. The longest time interval was three hours - for example in Orthodox communities in Southwestern Slovakia.

6 Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia

Bohemia and Moravia were occupied by the Germans and transformed into a German Protectorate in March 1939, after Slovakia declared its independence. The Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia was placed under the supervision of the Reich protector, Konstantin von Neurath. The Gestapo assumed police authority. Jews were dismissed from civil service and placed in an extralegal position. In the fall of 1941, the Reich adopted a more radical policy in the Protectorate. The Gestapo became very active in arrests and executions. The deportation of Jews to concentration camps was organized, and Terezin/Theresienstadt was turned into a ghetto for Jewish families. During the existence of the Protectorate the Jewish population of Bohemia and Moravia was virtually annihilated. After World War II the pre-1938 boundaries were restored, and most of the German-speaking population was expelled.

7 Rote Falken (Red Falcons)

An underground youth organization, which evolved from the labor movement.

8 Sudetenland

Highly industrialized north-west frontier region that was transferred from the Austro-Hungarian Empire to the new state of Czechoslovakia in 1919. Together with the land a German-speaking minority of 3 million people was annexed, which became a constant source of tension both between the states of Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia, and within Czechoslovakia. In 1935 a Nazi-type party, the Sudeten German Party financed by the German government, was set up. Following the Munich Agreement in 1938 German troops occupied the Sudetenland. In 1945 Czechoslovakia regained the territory and pogroms started against the German and Hungarian minority. The Potsdam Agreement authorized Czechoslovakia to expel the entire German and Hungarian minority from the country.

9 Anti-Jewish laws in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia

In March 1939, there lived in the Protectorate 92,199 inhabitants classified according to the so-called Nuremberg Laws as Jews. On 21st June 1939, Konstantin von Neurath, the Reich Protector, passed the so-called Edict Regarding Jewish Property, which put restrictions on Jewish property. On 24th April 1940, a government edict was passed which eliminated Jews from economic activity. Similarly like previous legal changes it was based on the Nuremburg Law definitions and limited the

legal standing of Jews. According to the law, Jews couldn't perform any functions (honorary or paid) in the courts or public service and couldn't participate at all in politics, be members of Jewish organizations and other organizations of social, cultural and economic nature. They were completely barred from performing any independent occupation, couldn't work as lawyers, doctors, veterinarians, notaries, defense attorneys and so on. Jewish residents could participate in public life only in the realm of religious Jewish organizations. Jews were forbidden to enter certain streets, squares, parks and other public places. From September 1939 they were forbidden from being outside their home after 8pm. Beginning in November 1939 they couldn't leave, even temporarily, their place of residence without special permission. Residents of Jewish extraction were barred from visiting theaters and cinemas, restaurants and cafés, swimming pools, libraries and other entertainment and sports centers. On public transport they were limited to standing room in the last car, in trains they weren't allowed to use dining or sleeping cars and could ride only in the lowest class, again only in the last car. They weren't allowed entry into waiting rooms and other station facilities. The Nazis limited shopping hours for Jews to twice two hours and later only two hours per day. They confiscated radio equipment and limited their choice of groceries. Jews weren't allowed to keep animals at home. Jewish children were prevented from visiting German, and, from August 1940, also Czech public and private schools. In March 1941 even so-called re-education courses organized by the Jewish Religious Community were forbidden, and from June 1942 also education in Jewish schools. To eliminate Jews from society it was important that they be easily identifiable. Beginning in March 1940, citizenship cards of Jews were marked by the letter 'J' (for Jude - Jew). From 1st September 1941 Jews older than six could only go out in public if they wore a yellow six- pointed star with 'Jude' written on it on their clothing.

10 Nemcova Bozena (1820 -1862)

Whose maiden name was Barbora Panklova, was born in Vienna into the family of Johann Pankl, a nobleman's coachman. Was significantly influenced during the years 1825-29 by her upbringing at the hands of her grandmother Magdalena Novotna. In 1837 she was married to financial official Josef Nemec. She contributed to a number of magazines. She was inspired by the stories of common folk to write seven collections of folk tales and legends and ten collections of Slovak fairy tales and legends, which are generally a gripping fictional adaptation of fairy-tale themes. Through her works Nemcova has to her credit the bringing together of the Czech and Slovak nations and their cultures. She is the author of travelogues and ethnographic sketches, realistic stories of the countryside and the supreme novel Granny. Thanks to her rich folkloristic work and particularly her work "Granny", Bozena Nemcova has taken her place among Czech national icons.

11 Winton, Sir Nicholas (b

1909): A British broker and humanitarian worker, who in 1939 saved 669 Jewish children from the territory of the endangered Czechoslovakia from death by transporting them to Great Britain.

12 Death march

In fear of the approaching Allied armies, the Germans tried to erase all evidence of the concentration camps. They often destroyed all the facilities and forced all Jews regardless of their age or sex to go on a death march. This march often led nowhere and there was no specific destination. The marchers received neither food nor water and were forbidden to stop and rest at

night. It was solely up to the guards how they treated the prisoners, if and what they gave them to eat and they even had in their hands the power on the prisoners' life or death. The conditions during the march were so cruel that this journey became a journey that ended in the death of most marchers. 13 'Action 77,000': A program organized by the communist regime, in which 77,000 people, judged to belong to the middle class, were dismissed from their administrative positions and were sent to do manual labor in factories. The rationale for this action was to degrade those that the regime regarded as intellectuals. Children of communist parents were given priority in admission to university, while children of middle-class parents were denied the possibility to pursue higher education, and, those who were already at university were often expelled.

14 Currency reform in Czechoslovakia (1953)

On 30th May 1953 Czechoslovakia was shaken by a so-called currency reform, with which the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSC) tried to improve the economy. It deprived all citizens of Czechoslovakia of their savings. A wave of protests, strikes and demonstrations gripped the country. Arrests and jailing of malcontents followed. Via the currency measures the Communist regime wanted to solve growing problems with supplies, caused by the restructuring of industry and the agricultural decline due to forcible collectivization. The reform was prepared secretly from midway in 1952 with the help of the Soviet Union. The experts involved (the organizers of the first preparatory steps numbered around 10) worked in strict isolation, sometimes even outside of the country. Cash of up to 300 crowns per person, bank deposits up to 5,000 crowns and wages were exchanged at a ratio of 5:1. Remaining cash and bank deposits, though, were exchanged at a ratio of 50:1. 15 Warsaw Pact Occupation of Czechoslovakia: The liberalization of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia during the Prague Spring (1967-68) went further than anywhere else in the Soviet block countries. These new developments were perceived by the conservative Soviet communist leadership as intolerable heresy dangerous for Soviet political supremacy in the region. Moscow decided to put a radical end to the chain of events and with the participation of four other Warsaw Pact countries (Poland, East Germany, Hungary and Bulgaria) ran over Czechoslovakia in August, 1968.

16 February 1948

Communist take-over in Czechoslovakia. The 'people's democracy' became one of the Soviet satellites in Eastern Europe. The state apparatus was centralized under the leadership of the Czechoslovak Communist Party (KSC). In the economy private ownership was banned and submitted to central planning. The state took control of the educational system, too. Political opposition and dissident elements were persecuted.

17 Prague Spring

A period of democratic reforms in Czechoslovakia, from January to August 1968. Reformatory politicians were secretly elected to leading functions of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSC). Josef Smrkovsky became president of the National Assembly, and Oldrich Cernik became the Prime Minister. Connected with the reformist efforts was also an important figure on the Czechoslovak political scene, Alexander Dubcek, General Secretary of the KSC Central Committee (UV KSC). In April 1968 the UV KSC adopted the party's Action Program, which was meant to show the new path to socialism. It promised fundamental economic and political reforms. On 21st March

1968, at a meeting of representatives of the USSR, Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, East Germany and Czechoslovakia in Dresden, Germany, the Czechoslovaks were notified that the course of events in their country was not to the liking of the remaining conference participants, and that they should implement appropriate measures. In July 1968 a meeting in Warsaw took place, where the reformist efforts in Czechoslovakia were designated as "counter-revolutionary." The invasion of the USSR and Warsaw Pact armed forces on the night of 20th August 1968, and the signing of the so-called Moscow Protocol ended the process of democratization, and the Normalization period began.

18 Zionism

A movement defending and supporting the idea of a sovereign and independent Jewish state, and the return of the Jewish nation to the home of their ancestors, Eretz Israel - the Israeli homeland. The final impetus towards a modern return to Zion was given by the show trial of Alfred Dreyfuss, who in 1894 was unjustly sentenced for espionage during a wave of anti-Jewish feeling that had gripped France. The events prompted Dr. Theodor Herzl (1860-1904) to draft a plan of political Zionism in the tract 'Der Judenstaat' ('The Jewish State', 1896), which led to the holding of the first Zionist congress in Basel (1897) and the founding of the World Zionist Organization (WZO). The WZO accepted the Zionist emblem and flag (Magen David), hymn (Hatikvah) and an action program.